

Rousseau



ABOUT THIS BOOK

ROUSSEAU'S ART is like a world of make-believe and startling dreams. In 22 splendid color plates—many extending across two and three pages — and numerous black-and-whites, we may study some of the greatest works of this modern "primitive" whose art is now treasured by many museums. Henri Rousseau's portraits of fellow Parisians, his flower pieces and jungle scenes, populated with nude women and fantastic beasts, are related in technique and style to folk-art, but superior in power of imagination. Alfred Werner, who guides us through the *douanier* Rousseau's poetic world is the author of monographs on Dufy and Utrillo.

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Plate 1. HENRI ROUSSEAU IN HIS STUDIO. Photo collection Tristan Tzara

HENRI
ROUSSEAU

(1844-1910)

text by

ALFRED WERNER



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ON THE COVER

CHILD WITH PUNCH

(commentary follows color plate section)

MILTON S. FOX, Editor.

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Plate 2. FISHERMAN. 1909-10. Oil, 14 x 18½"

Collection Dr. and Mrs. Harry Bakwin, New York

Henri Rousseau

WHEN MANET DECIDED: "Il n'y a d'amateurs que ceux qui font de la mauvaise peinture" ("There are no amateurs—except those who make bad pictures"), he spoke for those progressives who repudiated the tyranny of academic art which had enthroned "correct" drawing and painting as the highest artistic achievement. Had he lived, the aristocratic Manet

would surely have approved the work of the first of all "amateur painters" to achieve international fame, and the greatest of all, Henri Rousseau. A self-taught man, Rousseau gave us "primitive" art superior in its warmth and vigor to the disciplined, stifled products of the official academy. His inexhaustible imagination, coupled with a freshness of heart, led to the creation of boldly constructed and richly-hued masterpieces; and these have outlived all the anemic nudes and insipid mythologies of those academicians who skillfully plied their trained brushes like pencils, and filled in the outlines with thin, hard color.

Rousseau walked into modern art with the sure step of a somnambulist — or a fool. Indeed, hardly any other artist has been the butt of so many anecdotes as that foolish man, Henri Julien Félix Rousseau, whom the art world, to distinguish him from the Barbizon painter and several other Rousseaus, dubbed the *Douanier* (the customs official). Actually, during the decades prior to his career as an artist, he was employed, not as a *douanier*, but as a *gabelou*, a minor inspector at a toll station on the outskirts of Paris. To this day, there are critics who contend that he was a crank and that his childish daubs are not worthy of mention in a history of art.

There was, indeed, much bewildering naiveté in this Don Quixote who, between his retirement from service in 1885 at the age of forty-one and his death twenty-five years later, challenged the public with the most unacademic oils France had ever seen since an Academy of the Fine Arts was established, under the



Plate 3. SELF-PORTRAIT. 1895. Oil. *Modern Museum, Prague*



Plate 4. CART OF PERE JUNIET.



1908. Oil, 38 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 50 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Collection Mme. Jean Walter, Paris

Roi Soleil, to create a rigidly noble style. His own worst enemy, Rousseau unwittingly convinced most of his contemporaries that he was what some psychiatrists later claimed him to be: a child-man, with the mentality of a boy of six. An absurd play he sent to the Comedie Française was politely returned with the remark that its production would be too expensive. His comment on Cézanne's art ("I could finish all these pictures"), or his remark to Picasso, nearly forty years his junior, "We are the two greatest painters of our epoch, you in the Egyptian style, I in the modern style," were gleefully circulated in the artists' quarter. Many years ago the American painter Max Weber said to him, "Your pictures seem to me as beautiful as those of Giotto." "Who was Giotto?" the old man asked in astonishment. Prosecuted for his implication in a financial swindle, he was let off with a suspended sentence after the lawyer for the defense, to prove his client's "imbecility," had triumphantly displayed one of Rousseau's jungle scenes, and read aloud the most damaging reviews of the artist's work.

But if the judge, sharing the opinion of most Parisians, could find Rousseau's work nothing but hilariously funny, a sophisticated and well-trained man like Degas could not. At an exhibition, interrupting a discussion of aesthetic theories, he pointed at a picture by Rousseau: "Why shouldn't that be the painter of the future?" His startled friends saw a canvas which, apart from its subject matter, seemed atrocious even amidst the unorthodox art of the revolutionary Salon des Indépendants. The good fellow, a middle-aged



Plate 5. THE GARDEN. Oil. Private collection

family man whose education never went beyond the three R's, and who had never stepped inside an art school, had not the vaguest idea of how to model by means of perspective and the use of light and shade. Meticulously he applied to objects what he believed to be their local color, aiming at the closest possible imitation of nature. Conversations with the artist revealed a strange mixture of unworldly shyness with an unshakable belief in his own talent. In an autobiographical sketch he volunteered in 1895 for a book on contemporary artists (needless to say, it was not included), he referred to his parents' "lack of wealth" (his father was a small dealer in tinware at Laval in northwestern France) which at first prevented him from taking up art. Eventually, "after many mortifications, alone, with only nature as a teacher, and some advice received from Gérôme and Clément," he started to paint. In his own estimation he had, by 1895, become "one of our best realist painters."

These two once famous academicians had advised Rousseau to continue in his own manner, but only because they considered him a hopeless case. When the young poet, Guillaume Apollinaire also insisted that Rousseau must not change by so much as a hair's breadth his manner of painting, he was motivated by a sincere admiration of what Pissarro, Degas, Renoir, Gauguin, and the young Fauves and Cubist rebels adored in the *Douanier*: his direct approach, inherent sense of design, and virility of color. Ironically, Rousseau would have loved nothing better than to be able to paint with the miraculously polished tech-

nique and style of the arch-academician Bouguereau (whose death in 1905 disturbed him deeply).

Happily for him he was, like many a primitive, rarely conscious of his technical limitations, nor, for that matter, of the tricks played upon him by his genius, working as it was against his naturalistic "aesthetics." Doubts and hesitations à la Hamlet, so frequent among artists of wide culture, never assailed him. Basically, he had that sense of significant form, that feeling for composition that must pre-exist any schooling or acquisition of skill. Being self-taught, he had a vision which was untrammelled and took nothing for granted; it was the vision of a child freshly discovering the world and seeing charming details likely to be overlooked by the blasé intellectual. There he was, a petitbourgeois who, except for some time spent as a soldier in his youth, had no interesting experiences and, to compensate for this lack of stimulating adventures, indulged more freely and recklessly in daydreams than the busy and enterprising men and women around him.

When his first canvases were seen at the Salon des Indépendants they were greeted with jeers. But unprejudiced artists and critics, although aware of Rousseau's technical shortcomings, found his paintings as enchanting as imaginative Japanese color prints, or monumental Egyptian tomb paintings. In them was found the poetry of folk artists who never studied anatomy, never paused to compare the proportions of one object with those of another, and could give uninhibited expression to their dreams.

Rousseau's remarkable gifts—his sense of rhythm, feeling for color relations, his talent for simplification—somehow tinge everything he has done, even the clumsy portraits and unambitious little landscapes of his earlier years which only a madly devoted fan could pronounce as unchallengeable masterpieces.

His true talent was revealed, however, as a teller of fairytales, as *Rousseau le rêveur*. In canvases like *Carnival Evening* and *The Sleeping Gypsy* (see plate 16), or in his jungle scenes, his unfettered fantasy soared to great heights, and this flight later encouraged the pioneers of Surrealism, and of *pittura metafisica*.

The story that, as a youth, Rousseau saw Mexico as a regimental musician in a French expeditionary corps no longer finds much credence — although his friend, Apollinaire, insisted on it in a poem, "You remember, Rousseau, the Aztec landscape." He relied on his vivid imagination even more than on studies made in the Parisian zoo and botanical garden, to transport him to exotic jungles full of round-eyed animals which now stare at us with the same intense astonishment that most of his human sitters betray. He did not copy, did not reproduce — out of his humble heart and mind he created tapestries of beauty which the academic animal painters, with all their schooling and traveling, failed to achieve.

It has been speculated how Rousseau would have developed had he, in his formative years, been given the opportunity of attending the Ecole des Beaux-Arts of Paris. He might have become a skillful disci-



*Plate 6. PAST AND PRESENT (THE ARTIST AND HIS WIFE). 1895. Oil
Private collection*



Plate 7. SUMMER: THE PASTURE.



1906. Oil, $15\frac{3}{4}$ x $20\frac{1}{2}$ ". *Private collection*

ple of Bouguereau, Bonnat, Gérôme, and their ilk. For these teachers, who considered it their mission to foster no originality but polished, mechanical craftsmanship, would have encouraged Rousseau's most conspicuous bourgeois trait — his unfortunate yearning for respectability. Only Moreau might have brought about another result. Under the guidance of this teacher of Matisse and Rouault, poor, gentle Rousseau would not have been made to waste years in trying to acquire, the hard way, the ABC of technique; Moreau, who so strongly insisted on individualism, might have enabled Rousseau to become a modern Piero di Cosimo, a bird of poetry flitting to the sun with fully developed wings. Such a teacher might have planted in him that very necessary self-criticism whose total absence caused Rousseau (and that other *ingénu*, Utrillo) to alternate indisputable masterpieces with pitiable smears.

But we must not be ungrateful. One who was capable of producing a series of lovely works, from *Carnival Evening* to *The Dream*, under circumstances that would have crushed a less healthy man ("This evening I have only 15 centimes for supper," the sexagenarian wrote to Apollinaire in 1909) deserves a place in the ranks of the masters. He never learned all the tricks of his craft, but he made wise use of the legerdemain of an eternally young heart.

Does Rousseau, then, present a case against solid training and sophisticated background? After his rise to fame, scores of primitives acquired the courage to enter into competition with professional artists, and



Plate 8. THE WEDDING. 1905. Oil, 63 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 44 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

Collection Mme. Jean Walter, Paris

perhaps a half dozen produced canvases which, in their freshness and candor, are not without merit. None, however, reached the artistic heights of the *Douanier*. One should remember that, while he was simple in many ways, he was clever enough to know that perfection can be acquired only through "obstinate toil" (his own words). He was not a casual Sunday painter, but, during his last twenty-five years, worked incessantly towards the improvement of his skill and style. Art was not a hobby, but the essence of life to one who, in his own words, aspired to "the Beautiful and the Good." When the dealer Vollard asked him how he succeeded in getting so much air to circulate among the trees, and in having the moonlight look so real in *The Dream*, the aging artist replied, quite simply: "By observing nature." But this answer does not explain anything; the transformation of the little tollgate collector Rousseau into the *Douanier* who (according to Guillaume Apollinaire's epitaph) entered the realm of great art tax-free, remains a miracle and a mystery, a unique phenomenon above and beyond rationalization.

COLOR PLATES

PORTRAIT OF PIERRE LOTI

Painted 1891? Oil, 23³/₄ x 19¹/₂"

Kunsthaus, Zurich

This portrait is probably based on a drawing in a newspaper, for Rousseau is not known ever to have met the writer Pierre Loti (1850-1923). As in all of Rousseau's portraits, we encounter the rigid frontality familiar from most nineteenth-century cabinet photographs. While this is not a psychological study (all Rousseau portraits look very much alike, in the manner of Byzantine "portraits"), Loti is revealed as the extremely shy and reserved man he was (born Louis Marie Julien Viaud, he chose his pseudonym from the nickname given him by fellow-sailors who called him *le Loti* after an Indian flower which blooms unseen).

With the deep interest in exotic places evidenced by his jungle pieces, Rousseau must have been an admirer of Loti, whose works abound in descriptions of strange lands. A French naval officer, Loti was on his ship at the port of Algiers when he learned of his election to the French Academy, on May 21, 1891, and about that time Rousseau may have clipped Loti's picture from a newspaper. It is a picture of quiet grandeur. There is something magical about this portrait of a man and his cat (Loti loved cats and often wrote about them). The charming backdrop is reminiscent of *quattrocento* portraits. The fez the writer wears is to remind the public of Loti's journey recorded in the bestseller *Au Maroc*.

The playwright, Georges Courteline, who owned the picture for a while, placed it in his private *musée des horreurs*. When, many years after Rousseau's death, *Pierre Loti* was displayed in a window of the Rosenberg Gallery on the Avenue de l'Opera, Courteline was surprised to see a picture he had always considered a joke priced at 6,000 francs.





Plate 10. STORM IN THE JUNGLE



(commentary follows color plate section)

PLATE 11

PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG GIRL

Painted 1894? Oil, 24 x 18"

The Philadelphia Museum of Art

Uncompromisingly full-face, like all his portraits, this one of a petit-bourgeois girl is, as usual, set not against the drab and dreary panorama of the Plaisance Quarter, but in pastoral surroundings, such as Rousseau and his neighbors could see only on holiday excursions. If one concentrates on the impressive face and stiff body of the girl, and the ludicrous sheep at her feet, this picture may not rank very high as a work of art. But there is something disarming and touching about Rousseau's attempt to obtain monumentality — the girl almost reaches the height of the young, blossoming trees around her — and there is charm in the subtle contrasts of color.

Commenting on the fact that the girl dwarfs the woods behind her, Edward Alden Jewell makes her say, as Alice-in-Wonderland might: "Here I am . . . and with me present why bother about the trees, which, after all, are only trees?"





Plate 12. A CENTURY OF INDEPENDENCE



(commentary follows color plate section)



Plate 13. WAR



(commentary follows color plate section)

PLATE 14

BOY ON ROCKS

Painted 1895? Oil, 21½ x 17½"

Collection Chester Dale, New York

Rousseau's portraits of children are less widely appreciated than his other paintings. However fond the artist may have been of children (he had one child, a daughter by his first wife), he painted them almost invariably, though unwittingly, as ugly creatures, with inflexible, stout bodies. The eyes of these workers' children stare at us from beneath tragic brows, with a troubled intensity reminiscent of the precocious eyes in Velazquez' paintings of royal infants.

This boy in striped stockings sits very uncomfortably and self-consciously on a jagged rock. In Rousseau's own comment about a similar portrait, the "Alpine" landscape is explained as having been derived from the fortifications around Paris.

Certain oils by Picasso, such as two paintings of little girls, and his *Butterfly Hunter* (all of 1938), strongly recall *Boy on Rocks* and other children's portraits by Rousseau.



PLATE 15

THE CUSTOMS HOUSE

Painted 1900? Oil, 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 13"

The Courtauld Collection, London

André Malraux, who considers the picture "worthy of Uccello," reproduces in his book *The Voices of Silence* a photograph of the dull, commonplace Plaisance toll-gate on the page facing the visionary scene the artist made of it. The gentle, hilly landscape was invented by the painter who introduced an utterly Surrealist element in the figure of the man inexplicably standing on the roof of the brick building. The rich vegetation in the background links the picture with the exotic growth in Rousseau's jungle scenes rather than with the reality of a proletarian suburb. If this gate leads anywhere, then surely it is into a novel such as Kafka might have written.





SLEEPING GYPSY

Painted 1897. Oil, 51 x 70"

*The Museum of Modern Art, New York
(Gift of Mrs. Simon Guggenheim)*

This picture has stirred up much comment in the past four decades. Rousseau may have essayed a naturalistic work, inspired by the once celebrated oriental scenes of the academician Gerome. But what he created was a dream picture which was hailed by Jean Cocteau as "painted poetry," and influenced De Chirico's *Lion and Gladiator*; interestingly enough the mandolin and vase appear often in still lifes by Picasso and other Cubists. Just as the painting led Surrealists to place Rousseau among their predecessors, so disciples of Freud see in it symbols lending themselves to sexual interpretations. Are the majestic lion, sniffing curiously at the dark woman, and the river in the background, the sleeper's dream? Or, is it not all a dream? This is suggested by Cocteau who remarks that the painter, who never forgot a detail, put no imprints in the sand around the sleeper's feet. The gypsy did not come there, she is there, or rather, she is not there: "She is the secret soul of poetry, an act of faith, a proof of love."

Whatever interpretation is given to this extraordinary work, it is a painting one enjoys looking at. Rousseau himself was very proud of it, and he asked the mayor of his native Laval to purchase it for the town. Laval did not want the picture. Today, it is one of the prized possessions of New York's Museum of Modern Art. It has haunted the imagination of thousands by its trance-like quality, echoing Blake's poetry.



PLATE 17

ADAM AND EVE

Painted 1902. Oil, 36 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 22 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

Collection Mr. and Mrs. John Hay Whitney, New York

This naive, bucolic scene recalls similar renderings of the theme by the French school of the early fifteenth century. Here is one of Rousseau's few paintings of nudes. How astonishingly "sexless" these nude bodies are, compared to the lush portrayals of human flesh by his contemporary, Renoir! With disarming naiveté the petit-bourgeois Rousseau, very proper in his private life, and far removed from the Bohemian roistering of Montmartre, attempts an almost, but not quite, pagan worship of nature.

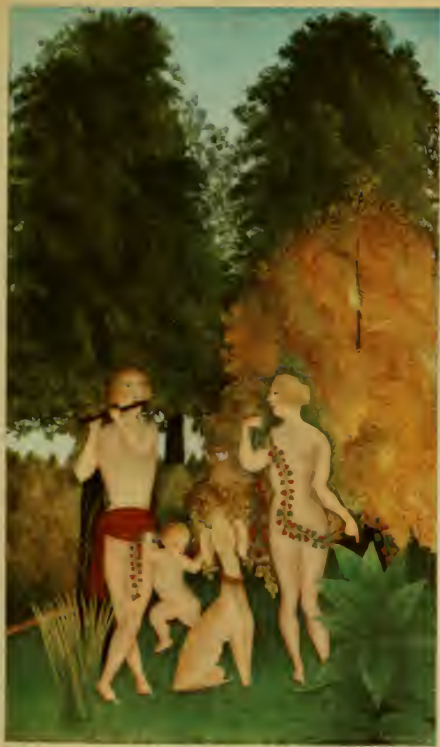


PLATE 18

PATH IN THE WOODS AT ST. CLOUD

Painted 1903. Oil, 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 14 $\frac{5}{8}$ "

Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt

The small figures stroll sedately beneath the archway of this tree-lined avenue in a Parisian suburb as though they were walking down the center aisle of a glorious Gothic cathedral. Unlike a trained artist who would have extracted the essence of the foliage in a few bold strokes (and so unlike his contemporaries, the Impressionists, who reduced trees to vibrating light), Rousseau, with his unyielding respect for every object, wished to convey the sense of every tiny leaf. Indeed, he delineated each with the precision and delicacy of a medieval miniaturist. His leaf by leaf rendering of trees is comparable to the brick by brick description of houses by a more recent "Primitive," Louis Vivin, a former postal clerk who became a painter at the age of sixty-two. After having carefully and childishly isolated each tiny phenomenon, both men, good artists that they were, were able to reassemble and re-fuse these hundreds of elements into a unity.







PLATE 19

THE HUNGRY LION

Painted 1905. Oil, 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 118 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

Collection Franz Meyer, Zurich

Rousseau created about twenty jungle pictures. This one was sent to the Salon d'Automne of 1905, the exhibition made famous by a group of daring young painters led by Matisse whom a hostile critic dubbed *Fauves* (wild beasts). The critics also noted *The Hungry Lion* in another room, and had, for the most part, scornful epithets for it. Rousseau sent this description to the catalogue:

"The hungry lion, throwing himself upon the antelope, devours him; the panther stands by, anxiously waiting for the moment when he can claim his share. Birds of prey have ripped out pieces of flesh from the poor animal who pours forth his deathcry! Setting sun."

To us, this scene is no more frightening than a fairy tale. It is as unrealistic as another picture which shows quantities of blood dripping to earth from the throat of a giraffe attacked by a tiger. But for Rousseau the atmosphere seemed permeated with uncanny reality, and when he was painting a subject of this sort, he frightened himself so much that in fear and trembling he had to open a window.

← FOR ENTIRE PAINTING, LIFT FOLD

PLATE 20

THE HOLY FAMILY

Painted 1905. Oil, 35 x 25"

Collection Paul Hyde Bonner

Summerville, South Carolina

In the nineteenth century, with its insistence on historical accuracy, painters often made detailed studies of antiquity before painting biblical subjects. One of Rousseau's contemporaries even traveled to Palestine to copy the countryside and study native models. Degas was not at all impressed: "My dear Tissot," he said, "the Christ Child wasn't born at Bethlehem, but at Epinal." He referred to naive, yet enchanting colored pictures of religious subjects made by folk artists in the provincial town of Epinal. Rousseau's picture is reminiscent of these *images d'Epinal*, and even more of earlier French miniatures, paintings, and tapestries on which biblical subjects were depicted with utter disregard for historical truth. In a genre-like interpretation, these pictures have a light and worldly overtone. In this earthy human Holy Family, the carpenter Joseph, in a fine red robe, is anachronistically yet undisturbedly, smoking his long-stemmed pipe, while the Child is suckling vigorously at Mary's breast.





PLATE 21 (LEFT)

THE MERRY JESTERS

Painted 1906. Oil

Philadelphia Museum of Art

(Arensberg Collection)

Quite a few of Rousseau's jungle pictures are filled with a ferocity bordering on sadism that is quite astonishing in this meek little man. Lions and tigers attack other animals or natives, and the artist does not spare us any gory details. In this picture, however, the animals pose in complete peaceability amidst the unspoiled nature of a primordial landscape much too ordered to be real. But no one should compare these flat, tapestry-like compositions to real jungles. Maurice Raynal once wrote: "Had Rousseau seen virgin forests and jungles he would not have been able to paint them with the enthusiasm and the extraordinary coloring of his invention."

PLATE 22 (RIGHT)

LIBERTY INVITING THE ARTISTS

Painted 1906. Oil, 68 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 47"

Collection Franz Meyer, Zurich

(Extended loan to the Museum of Modern Art,
New York)

This large allegory has a long, complete title: "Liberty Inviting the Artists To Take Part in the 22nd Salon des Indépendants." In the center, the Lion of Belfort—Paris' well-known monument—stands guard over a scroll of honor upon which are inscribed several illustrious names, among them, in addition to that of Rousseau himself, those of Seurat, Signac, and Pissarro. Just as in medieval pictures royalty is always shown towering above the others, so Odilon Redon, seen here shaking hands with an artist, was made taller because he was president of the Salon.







PLATE 23

REPAST OF THE LION

Oil, 44 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 63"

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

There is much serenity in this powerfully constructed canvas, so strongly reminiscent of sixteenth-century Brussels tapestries, filled as they were with big-scale plants and large animals such as hounds and lions. Though nearly dwarfed by the stylized, unbelievable flowers, drawn many times their original size, the lion, quietly engrossed in his meal, is the center of our attention. Artists of all periods have been fascinated by this majestic beast, from the ancient Assyrians whose great bas-reliefs showed lions crouching, leaping, or mortally wounded and writhing in agony, to our French contemporary, Bernard Lorjou, who paints lion hunts in violent color.

The present canvas belonged to Sam A. Lewisohn whose collection was bequeathed to the Metropolitan Museum. In a foreword to the catalogue of the Lewisohn Collection, Francis Henry Taylor, former director of the Museum, writes: "The strange sensation of silence and anxiety which is given out by the *Repast of the Lion* is quite unlike anything else in the history of painting."

PLATE 24

SPRING IN THE VALLEY OF
THE BIEVRE

Painted 1908? Oil, 21 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ "

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

The Bièvre is a small stream emptying from the left bank into the Seine near Paris. Rousseau was familiar with the suburban scene, and as carefully and literally as possible, he recorded all its details, including the dark picket fence in the foreground and the railway viaduct in the background. Yet this is not an amateur's rendering of the scene: the intertwined branches of the young trees provide a cadence, as if they had been set in motion by a choreographer's fancy. A childlike innocence pervades this intricate design: the little promenaders, appear like pigmies in contrast to the tall trunks of the trees.



PLATE 25

FOOTBALL

Painted 1908. Oil, 40 x 32"

Collection Mrs. Henry D. Sharpe

Providence, Rhode Island

These men in striped union suits, apparently playing football, look slightly ridiculous—unless we consider this a dream picture like the jungle paintings. The men might be dancers in a Surrealist ballet; the horizontal stripes of their jerseys combined with the vertical motions of the limbs produce a hypnotically rhythmical pattern. Strange, too, is the scene in which the action is set: a small clearing in a sunlit, autumnal wood. The Surrealist mood is heightened by the fact that the teams are to be distinguished not only by the color of their uniforms, but, oddly enough, even by the color of their hair.

Daniel Catton Rich defended the picture against those who dismissed it as an absurdity: "To those who saw deeper the picture could be related to the traditions of Tournai tapestries and the frescoes of Avignon."



Salvador Dalí



THE DREAM

Painted 1910. Oil, 80 x 118½"

*The Museum of Modern Art, New York
(Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller)*

This huge canvas, acquired by New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1954, and then described as the "most costly" work ever acquired by the Museum, was painted in the artist's last year. The nude on the red sofa (so very much like the couch Max Weber and other visitors saw in Rousseau's own studio) is the artist's former love, Yawwigha, transported by a dream into the jungle, there to listen to the dark piper's melodies. This is a superb summing-up of all elements in the jungle series: the tropical flowers and fruits, wild beasts and strange birds in the mass of dark and dense verdure, with the white moon in the light sky, and the two eerie human figures. Yet these hundreds of details are so beautifully held together by color and rhythm that artists and laymen of all nations have paid homage to this grand, tapestry-like work fraught with mystery.

To the picture, exhibited in the Salon des Indépendants of 1910 the artist attached an explanatory poem:

Yawwigha, peacefully asleep,
enjoys a lovely dream:
she hears a kind snake charmer
playing upon his reed.
On stream and foliage glisten
the silvery beams of the moon;
and savage serpents listen
to the gay, entrancing tune.

At least one artist of an earlier age would have worshipped the picture as much as it was revered by the young avant-garde of the pre-World War I days, namely, William Blake. He had provided a credo that could very well speak for all of Rousseau's creations: "He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments and in stronger and better light than his perishing and mortal eye can see, does not imagine at all."



PLATE 27

PORTRAIT OF JOSEPH BRUMMER

Painted 1910. Oil, 45 x 34 1/4"

Collection Franz Meyer, Zurich

The subject of the painting was one of the first dealers to purchase pictures from Rousseau. The artist was rather ingenuous in his approach to portraiture, taking exact measures of his sitters as though he were a tailor, and naively transferring these onto the canvas, and holding up against their faces a brush dipped into color to make sure he had obtained the proper flesh tones. Despite this unsophisticated procedure, he gradually improved his skill to the extent that his final portraits tower above the stiff and lifeless dolls he produced at the start of his career.

Like many another artist, Rousseau endowed his sitter with features or qualities of his own—intensity mitigated by gentleness. As usual, there is a wealth of foliage in the background, a decorative pattern, derived originally perhaps from a cheap photographer's backcloth, but gradually lifted by the artist to the rhythmic beauty of exotic tapestry.



PLATE 28

FLOWERS IN A VASE

Painted 1909. Oil, 18³/₈ x 13¹/₂"

The Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo

There are as many ways to paint flowers as there are different species. Rousseau was a contemporary of the Impressionists who, suppressing details, have given us misty bouquets, enchanting through their vague atmospheric effects. Both Gauguin and Van Gogh painted flowers in bold strokes of riotous color. Rousseau, however, carefully arranged them in the vase to paint each leaf, each petal with minute care. Thus we can recognize in this picture clusiana tulip, acacia, daisy, forget-me-not, and a branch of ivy in the foreground.

While the artist awarded the same importance to each blossom and each leaf, he did not fail to orchestrate the elements into striking harmonies (it was not in vain that he was a fiddler, and even a composer of sorts!) Though Rousseau saw each flower singly, the sense of the bunch, the *Gestalt* of the bouquet, was not lost. And it must have been intentionally that he painted the table top and vase so plainly and so austerely in order to bring out more dramatically the grandeur of the flowers.

Paul Klee, an admirer of Rousseau, saw his work at Wilhelm Uhde's gallery in Paris, and in a dealer's shop in Düsseldorf. It has been said of Klee's *Flowers in Glasses* (1925) that, in their Franciscan simplicity, they recall the *Douanier*.



PLATE 29

THE POET AND HIS MUSE

Painted 1910. Oil, 57 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 38 $\frac{1}{8}$ "

Kunstmuseum, Basel

When Rousseau painted this double portrait, Marie Laurencin (the "Muse"), in her early twenties, had just begun to show her paintings at the Salon des Indépendants. Youthful, too, was the poet, of Polish and Italian parentage, who wrote under the pen name of Guillaume Apollinaire, one of the early defenders and biographers of Rousseau. Symbolically, Mademoiselle Laurencin makes a gesture of annunciation; Apollinaire holds a pen in one hand, a scroll in the other. Max Weber recalls taking Picasso to Rousseau's studio where they saw Apollinaire posing for the picture: "We sat watching, like two quiet little mice, but Picasso was very upset that the arm was much too long."

In this second version of the picture, the flowers in the foreground are *l'oiellet de poète* (sweet william) as originally planned. Rousseau insisted on painting the picture a second time after he discovered that the flowers in the first version (now in the Museum of Modern Western Art, Moscow) turned out, by mistake, to be gilliflowers.

There is an exuberance of vegetation everywhere. Marie Laurencin wears a wreath of pansies around her head, and the background has the same setting of foliage which was intended to give an "exotic" touch to the portrait of Brummer.



Commentary for

COVER PICTURE

CHILD WITH PUNCH

Painted 1903. Oil, 39³/₈ x 34¹/₄"

Collection Werner Reinhardt, Winterthur, Switzerland

Most of Rousseau's portraits of children are quite awkward, the youngsters seem stiff and ill at ease, as though posing for a photographer (a long and tedious affair in the nineteenth century). But in this particular case, the artist succeeded in creating a lifelike child, possessed of great charm. This child, standing in a grassy park or garden, carries a lapful of flowers in the skirt caught up with the right hand, while from the left dangles a gaily-colored puppet.

Rousseau's neighbors in the proletarian Plaisance Quarter—a section in the fourteenth *arrondissement* on the Left Bank—employed the artist as a portraitist, while flatly rejecting as ridiculous his other paintings. Picasso's first wife, Fernande Olivier, who knew Rousseau, relates: "All the shopkeepers in the neighborhood had themselves photographed, so to speak, by Rousseau, paying for it in kind with their goods."

Another friend of Rousseau, the dealer Wilhelm Uhde, asserts, however, that this particular picture was a commissioned portrait for which the artist received 300 francs, perhaps the largest sum he ever received for a painting. The child's parents later decided that they could not afford this extravagance, and so the picture was sacrificed to settle a laundry bill.

Commentary for

PLATE 10

STORM IN THE JUNGLE

Painted 1891. Oil, 50½ x 62"

Collection Mr. and Mrs. Henry Clifford

Radnor, Pennsylvania

It is surprising that Rousseau succeeded so well with his first attempt to paint what are supposed to be tropical forests. At one time it was supposed that Rousseau, in his youth, had seen tropical flora and fauna in Mexico, where, according to the story, he was a soldier in the French army dispatched to aid the Emperor Maximilian. The story is now discredited. Rousseau never entered Mexico. Indeed none of the beasts he depicts in his jungle scenes, and not one of his plants can be found there. As Maximilian Gauthier expressed it, Rousseau's America has no more to do with geography than Chateaubriand's. Unlike Gauguin or the German Max Pechstein, Rousseau did not have to go to exotic lands. His inspiration came from visits to the Paris zoo and botanical gardens that had fascinated Barye and Delacroix before him.

This imaginary jungle is in upheaval; a storm tosses the branches of the trees and the tall grasses through which a terror-stricken tiger is seen skulking. Each leaf, each detail is most carefully drawn without, however, distracting from the miraculous overall design of this large canvas, produced only six years after Rousseau became a full-time painter. The picture is unsurpassed in its rendering of violent movement, and the only naive feature (naive in Western art though quite common in sophisticated Oriental art)—the entire canvas is striped with thin lines to indicate the pelting rain—does not reduce the greatness of imagination and conception.

Commentary for

PLATE 12

A CENTURY OF INDEPENDENCE

Painted 1892. Oil, 42 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 60 $\frac{5}{8}$ "

Galerie Alex Voemel, Düsseldorf

Fearing that he might not be completely understood, Rousseau often provided comment, in poetry or prose, to his pictures. For the catalogue of the 1892 Salon des Indépendants he wrote this explanation: "The people, holding hands, dance around the two Republics, those of 1792 and 1892, to the tune of '*Aupres de ma blonde qu'il fait bon, fait bon dormir.*'" This tree-circling dance of patriotic peasants in red Phrygian caps recalls paintings by Bruegel, especially the *Wedding Dance in the Open Air* (now in the Detroit Institute of Arts), for in either painting movement and rhythm joyfully pervade the whole composition. Notice that all the flags stream uniformly in the breeze, and mark also the eighteenth-century costume of the group standing in the right corner. Rousseau never read Leonardo's advice to artists, in his *Trattato della Pittura*, to watch people in real life, to observe their attitudes, and to note all down for later use in painting. He did not need such advice, for he belonged entirely to the simple folk that people his canvases.

Commentary for

PLATE 13

WAR

Painted 1894. Oil, 44½ x 76"

Museum of Modern Art, Paris

Rousseau, who served in the French army during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71, was an ardent pacifist. At a little gathering in his home in honor of the 14th of July Rousseau showed his German guest, Wilhelm Uhde, that among the flags fluttering in front of the window was the German flag. "Are you for peace?" he asked the dealer. Having been reassured on this point, the *Douanier* lifted his glass for a toast. Among the few comments on any topic outside of art that Rousseau is known to have made is this: "If a king tries to start a war, a mother should go to him and forbid it."

The canvas entitled *War* is now in The Louvre. In its vigorous movement and imaginative power it belongs with other great condemnations of war: Goya's *The Disasters of War*, Otto Dix's *War*, and Picasso's *Guernica*. An unforgettable Surrealist element of strength is introduced by the blackness of the horse. For the catalogue of the Salon des Indépendants Rousseau offered this explanation: "Frightful, she passes, leaving in her wake despair, tears, and ruins." A small version, a lithograph on red paper (incidentally, Rousseau's only print) was made for a magazine.



Plate 30. ARTILLERYMEN. Oil, 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 31 $\frac{3}{4}$ ".



The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York



Plate 31. THE DIRIGIBLE. Oil. Private collection.



Plate 32. THE TIGER HUNT. Oil, 15 x 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ "

The Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, Columbus, Ohio



Plate 33. THE SNAKE CHARMER. 1907. Oil, 65 x 73 1/4". The Louvre, Paris

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

- 1844 Henri Julien Félix Rousseau born May 20, 1844, Laval, France.
- 1870 Service in the French Army (Franco-Prussian War).
- 1871-85 Employed as a *gabelou* (minor inspector) in a toll station.
- 1880 Earliest dated paintings.
- 1886 Started to exhibit at the Salon des Indépendants.
- 1897 Painted *The Sleeping Gypsy*.
- 1905 Exhibited with the Fauves (Wild Beasts) at the Salon d'Automne.
- 1908 Banquet given in his honor by Picasso.
- 1909 First serious comment on his work, by Arsène Alexandre, appeared in print.
- 1910 Painted *The Dream*. He died in Paris on September 4 from a chill caught one night when paying court to a reluctant lady.

SOME COMMENTS ABOUT
HENRI ROUSSEAU

André Derain: "Compared to Rousseau, Cézanne is a trickster."

Max Weber: "To enter his studio was like going into a fresh vineyard from a murky world. He seemed a pure, almost saintly man, full of love and joyous at the sight of the world. He was not an 'amateur'; painting was his central expression, his whole life."

Pablo Picasso: "Rousseau . . . represents perfection in a certain category of thought. The first work of the *Douanier* which I chanced to purchase obsessed me from the moment I saw it. . . . A head stuck out, a woman's face with a hard look, a work of French insight, of decision and clearness. . . . It is one of the most revealing French psychological portraits."

Fernande Olivier: "It was a pity he did not illustrate childrens' books, he could have done it so well. . . . He saw with the eyes of a child, assisted by the brains of a child. . . . I do not think I am maligning him by saying that he had no intelligence. He had something better than that, a unique gift, a kind of genius. . . ."

Arsène Alexandre: "I would like to have some of these pictures, not to hang them on the wall, for they exercise a dangerous fascination, but to look at them from time to time when we need to be reminded of sincerity."

Elie Faure: ". . . a real primitive, a Giotto without training or culture . . . he was haunted by tropical landscapes so luxuriant, so pure, so fresh, so full of brilliance and of candor, so far from us, and so near to imaginary paradise and to miraculous gardens, that everything grows pale at times and effaces itself when hanging with these paintings which go beyond all bounds, like green plants or like carpets of the Orient."

Wilhelm Uhde: "People should stop talking about the 'naiveté' of Rousseau. . . . With no artist have I discussed more seriously the various artistic points of view, the method of obtaining this or that balance, the choice of this or that tone, than with Henri Rousseau."

SOME OTHER BOOKS
ABOUT ROUSSEAU

Adolphe Basler. *Henri Rousseau*. Paris, Librairie de France, 1927

Pierre Courthion. *Henri Rousseau*. Geneva, A. Skira, 1944

Maximilien Gauthier. *Henri Rousseau*. Paris, Les Gêmeaux, 1949

Daniel Catton Rich. *Henri Rousseau*. New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1942

Wilhelm Uhde. *Henri Rousseau*. Bern, A. Scherz, 1948

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Art Critic, New York Times

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HENRI ROUSSEAU

TEXT BY ALFRED WERNER

IN THE HISTORY OF MODERN ART, there is no figure more touching than the poor and humble Henri Rousseau, a half-educated Parisian *douanier* (toll collector) who, late in life, started on the long road of art. During his lifetime, many curious anecdotes were circulated about this peculiar man, but only a few younger artists, among them Picasso, Derain, and Vlaminck — were astute enough to recognize in this untutored painter a genius beyond comparison. The same pictures that were once dismissed with laughter as the ridiculous daubs of a childish old man are now among the prized possessions of the Louvre, the Courtauld Institute in London, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In power of design and vivid imagination Rousseau overshadows many gold medalists with extensive academic training. "Sunday painters" of today now claim him as their spiritual ancestor, forgetting that Rousseau retired from his job to dedicate himself fully and passionately to his labor of love. The volume, written by Alfred Werner, noted American critic and writer, contains over 30 plates, many of them in color.

TITLES NOW READY

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Utrillo - Van Gogh - Velazquez - Vlaminck